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AUTHOR Sass-Lehrer, Marilyn; Gerner de Garcia, Barbara; Rovins, Michele

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ABSTRACT

This monograph offers a variety of suggestions for creating a supportive multicultural climate for deaf children and their families. A section on responding to changing needs notes the special needs of deaf children from diverse backgrounds and suggests 7 strategies for developing cultural competence and 11 suggestions for improving outreach services. Eight strategies address various instructional approaches; five guidelines identify desirable features in instructional materials; and six actions are urged to address leadership issues. A resource guide identifies general references, readings for teachers, books for students (by grade level), instructional guides and handbooks, and World Wide Web resources. (Contains approximately 125 references.) (DB)

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Sharing
Ideas

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by
*Marilyn Sass-Lehrer
Barbara Gerner de Garcia
and Michele Rovins*

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**Creating a
Multicultural
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*Marilyn Sass-Lehrer
Barbara Gerner de Garcia
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*Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center
Gallaudet University, Washington, D.C.*

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E-mail: Marteal.Pitts@gallaudet.edu

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Sharing Ideas

The Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center's (formerly Pre-College National Mission Programs) "Sharing Ideas" series is comprised of working or occasional papers and videos of interest to parents and teachers of deaf and hard of hearing children, researchers, school administrators, support service personnel, and policy makers. Works in the series are often prepared for a specific 'occasion,' and include papers, presentations, or final reports that address a need in the field or contribute to the growing body of knowledge about educating deaf and hard of hearing children. The intent of the series is to act as a clearinghouse for sharing information from a number of sources.

These widely disseminated papers cover a broad range of timely topics, from describing innovative teaching strategies to reviewing the literature in an area of inquiry to summarizing the results of a research study. In every case, there is a common focus: improving the quality of education for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Clerc Center welcomes feedback about the concepts presented, particularly in the case of 'working papers,' which often represent works in progress or express the views or experiences of an author.

Researchers, graduate students, parents, and teachers are encouraged to send proposals for review and possible inclusion in the Sharing Ideas series. Submissions to the series are reviewed by content experts before acceptance for publication as Clerc Center products.

About the Authors

Marilyn Sass-Lehrer

Marilyn Sass-Lehrer is a Professor of Education at Gallaudet University and Project Director for the Family-Centered Early Education specialization in the teacher preparation program. Her school-based experience includes working in schools for the deaf as well as public school programs with children and their families. Dr. Sass-Lehrer is actively involved in professional organizations that promote professional development and projects that promote partnerships between families and schools. Her publications cover topics such as teacher competencies, diversity, and family-centered early education, and her research interests include support services for families with young children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Barbara Gerner de Garcia

Barbara Gerner de Garcia, Ed.D. is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Foundations and Research, Gallaudet University. She previously worked as Program Coordinator and teacher in the Hispanic Deaf Program of the Horace Mann School for the Deaf in Boston, Massachusetts. She teaches multicultural education courses at Gallaudet and is Project Director of Project THREADS, funded by the U.S. Department of Education to increase the multicultural competence of inservice teachers of the deaf.

Michele Rovins

Michele Rovins is a Program Associate for the Federal Resource Center for Special Education at the Academy for Educational Development. Her primary responsibilities include writing/editing and website maintenance. She recently spent time working on a variety of technology and deafness-related research grants specifically related to closed captioning and American Sign Language. She received a Master's degree in Deaf Education from Gallaudet University.

Creating a Multicultural School Climate for Deaf Children and Their Families

How well do you know your students? Most teachers can probably describe their students' academic and linguistic strengths and needs, but how much do we really know about their families, their backgrounds, traditions and values? As schools become more and more ethnically diverse, educators are likely to be less and less familiar with the experiences their students bring to the classroom.

Rapid demographic changes are altering the face of education in the United States. There are indications that students who are deaf may be even more diverse than the general school-age population. An annual survey from the Center for Assessment and Demographic Studies at Gallaudet University in 1992-1993 indicated that approximately 40 percent of youngsters in programs for deaf students were from racial, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds that differed from the majority white, English-speaking culture (Schildroth & Hotto, 1994).

Given the growing diversity found in schools and programs for youngsters who are deaf, the term "minority deaf" is no longer useful (Jordan, 1990). "Multicultural deaf" better reflects the new reality. Multicultural deaf children and adults face the challenge of coping with at least three different cultures—their own ethnic or racial groups, the Deaf community, and the mainstream—still predominantly white, middle-class, and hearing.

Responding to Changing Needs

A 1988 report from the Commission on the Education of the Deaf, *Toward Equality*, and the 1989 work by Johnson, Erting & Liddell, *Unlocking the Curriculum*, fostered an ongoing debate regarding the status of education for deaf and hard of hearing students in this country. Missing from that debate is an analysis of the achievements of multicultural deaf children (Gerner de Garcia, 1992). Neither of those major reports, for example, addresses the academic performance of African-American deaf children, whose achievements fall below those of white deaf children, nor of Hispanic deaf children, who achieve at the lowest level of all (Cohen, Fischgrund & Redding, 1990).

In responding to the needs of children from diverse backgrounds, educators can take advantage of the vast literature and resources available on bilingual and multicultural issues in education. While written with a hearing population in mind, much of that information is also relevant to the situations of deaf children and their families.

Educators of children and youth who are deaf may have an even greater responsibility to create environments that value and respond to a multiplicity of perspectives and learning styles. Communication barriers often prevent deaf children in hearing families from acquiring a complete understanding of the accepted values, traditions and behaviors of the cultures into which they were born (Henderson & Henderschott, 1991). Schools can create vital cultural and linguistic links for families, students, and communities.

Multicultural education, however, provides far-reaching benefits for students from every kind of background. Youngsters from society's "mainstream" also thrive in schools that model respect and appreciation for diversity, helping them develop skills for learning and interacting in a culturally diverse society.

Is your school culturally competent? How well does the faculty of your program understand the multiple perspectives your students bring to school? Are your outreach activities and educational services inviting and fully accessible to families? Are the curricula, instructional approaches, and materials used in your program selected with a view to helping all of the students participate in the society of the future? Is there a commitment to creating an environment that represents every facet of the school community, one that encourages full participation?

The following guidelines, based on the research literature and the experiences of the authors, are designed to help educators build a multicultural learning environment for students and their families.

Cross-Cultural Competence

The development of cultural competence is a process; the goal is for every member of the school community to demonstrate respect and appreciation for diverse traditions, beliefs, lifestyles, and languages. It also assumes the ability of educators to translate that understanding and sensitivity into practical skills for working and interacting with people from a variety of cultures to build bridges between families, students, communities, and schools.

Lynch & Hanson (1992) suggest the following strategies for developing cultural competence:

- Develop a clear understanding of your own beliefs, values, and practices, and how they are influenced by culture.
- Gather information about the cultures of individuals and groups represented among the populations you serve.
- Recruit help from bicultural individuals as guides to specific customs and practices.
- Participate in the activities of members of other cultural groups.
- At a minimum, learn a few common phrases in the languages of families with whom you work.
- Recognize differences in the communication styles of various cultures; learn to communicate in culturally appropriate ways.
- When disagreements occur, show respect and make a sincere effort to understand other perspectives.

Outreach Services

Barriers to providing families with information and services arise when professionals and school programs respond inadequately to cultural or linguistic differences. Schools need to establish routine practices that will minimize misunderstandings and improve the accessibility of programs and services to all members of the community. Family members are more likely to develop an understanding of the deaf experience and to become involved in school-sponsored activities when school personnel develop and use culturally sensitive approaches.

For every family, ways of adjusting to and accommodating a child who has disabilities, including deafness, are influenced by the family's basic values and beliefs. Cultural values and family structures or roles may affect the family's responses to professional intervention or school expectations, and may provide insight into how and with whom the school should communicate.

In some families, for example, the male head of the household or a grandparent—rather than the mother—may be the appropriate person with whom to discuss a child's progress and program recommendations. The child's mother may be unwilling or unable to make decisions, or even to communicate directly with professionals in the school.

Lack of participation or "enthusiasm" may be the result of many factors, including lack of trust in educational or other public institutions, or a history of negative experiences with schools and public services. It may also indicate high levels of stress for family members, overwhelmed by the dual struggles of trying adapt to the dominant culture and to understand the implications of their child's deafness (Fischgrund, Cohen, Clarkson, 1987).

The following suggestions may help improve home/school relationships and encourage greater participation of families who are not part of the mainstream culture.

- Provide translations of printed information for parents, including school and program brochures, newsletters, and announcements of special events.
- Provide language interpreters to assure full access to all school functions and programs.
- Be specific about ways in which parents can get involved in their children's education.

- Develop trusting, personal relationships with families.
- Offer opportunities for parents from various language groups or ethnic communities to meet and form support groups; for example, set up groups of Hispanic or Asian parents.
- Develop an advocacy system to help parents express their views, even when those views differ from those of the school, educational professionals, or other parents.
- Arrange community meetings to share information about school programs, resources and services.
- Make it easier for families to attend school functions by providing transportation and child care.
- Organize "buddy systems" to welcome new students and their families to the school.
- Schedule events on days and times that are likely to attract all members of the school community.
- Plan school events and programs in consultation with individuals from the various communities associated with the school.

Instructional Approaches

Creating a multicultural school climate entails an analysis of curricula and instructional approaches as well as the materials and resources available to students. Rather than designing specific study units that focus on single cultures, or acknowledging various groups of people only on designated holidays—Martin Luther King's birthday, for example—work toward multicultural consciousness in all areas of the curriculum.

A multiculturally responsive classroom environment encourages students to appreciate diversity, to develop awareness of the needs of others, and to demonstrate respect for individual differences. The challenge is to design learning activities that encourage students to be sensitive to others, to employ critical thinking, to overcome negative attitudes, and to develop a positive self-identity, based on their own strengths rather than on the weaknesses of others (Derman-Sparks, 1989).

The following kinds of strategies can help schools create more inclusive curricula and instructional approaches.

- Create a family atmosphere in the classroom, encouraging students and teachers to share their accomplishments, fears and struggles in social, as well as academic, areas.
- Integrate study of the languages, history, customs, and perspectives of different peoples throughout the curriculum. For example, during language instruction, introduce words and signs from different languages (Mommy-Mami, Daddy-Papi, Grandpa-Abuelito, Grandma-Abuelita). Lessons dealing with foods or clothing should include ethnic dishes or costumes that are familiar to children from different backgrounds.
- Approach the study of holidays and historic events from the perspectives of all the peoples involved. For example, how do Native Americans see Thanksgiving? This approach can build students' understanding of various points of view and empower them to challenge accepted "facts." Use art, music, and movement to celebrate the creative elements of different cultures.
- Utilize learner-centered rather than teacher-directed classroom approaches. That is, involve students in the learning process through such interactive teaching strategies as cooperative learning and whole language approaches.
- Encourage students to use dialogue journals and other ways of sharing their experiences and relating new learning to their own experience and perspectives.
- Provide learning environments that are student-centered and supportive, getting students from a variety of cultures involved in shared learning experiences.
- Form planning groups of students and teachers to design thematic units that reflect issues and themes relevant to their lives.
- Encourage family and community members to participate in every aspect of the instructional program: Ask for parent volunteers to serve as classroom aides or field trip chaperons. Create opportunities for students to get to know many different kinds of people and learn about their similarities and differences.

Choosing Materials

A well-designed classroom for deaf and hard of hearing learners is typically very stimulating, offering a variety of media and printed materials. A review of the books, posters, bulletin boards, art work, and instructional materials available in classrooms, the school library, and other areas can tell a lot about the extent to which a school accommodates the diverse backgrounds, lifestyles, and physical abilities and challenges of students and their families.

On the other hand, instructional materials should not be chosen solely for their cultural significance. Classroom materials must also have educational value and be appropriate to the ages, developmental stages, and interests of students (Saracho & Spodek, 1983). Helpful classroom materials should offer the following features:

- Clear representations of individuals from diverse backgrounds and with a range of physical abilities.
- Accurate information about a wide variety of cultures and cultural groups.
- Presentations of experiences and issues that are both realistic and important to various groups of individuals.
- Accurate, non-stereotyped representations of individuals who are members of ethnic or cultural groups.
- Activities that encourage students to share information about each other and to find commonalities as well as differences. For example, students might make personal collages that include pictures of themselves and family members at various ages, their homes, places they have visited; and information about where they were born, foods and games they like, and other background material.

Leadership Issues

While schools, by their very nature, tend to reflect the dominant culture, school leaders can transform their programs into culturally responsive places of learning. It requires a commitment to recruiting staff members from diverse backgrounds, assuring access to culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families, providing outstanding staff development, and building strong family and commu-

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nity relationships. Only the leaders of a school can insure a learning environment in which faculty members, curricula and instruction, materials, and school/community relationships combine to make everyone feel included.

- Actively recruit a diverse staff for every job in the school, including leadership positions.
- Involve individuals from the community in all aspects of the school program.
- Provide a systematic program of staff development to help employees acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and skills required for a culturally responsive program.
- Provide resources and support to insure that every communication from the school is accessible to all members of the community.
- Plan specific programs to foster appreciation of diversity.
- Design and mandate equitable practices for student placement, assessment, and participation in all school activities.

In attempting to create a responsive school environment for deaf and hard of hearing youngsters from every cultural background, educators must begin by examining their own views regarding the diversity of cultures children bring to school. Tom Humphries (1993) contends that a society that is reluctant to view children and adults who are deaf as bicultural may also be uncomfortable with the broader concept of multiculturalism.

Many schools are working to revise curricula and school philosophies to incorporate Deaf studies and American Sign Language. A thoughtful approach to multicultural education for students who are deaf recognizes the interrelationships of Deaf Culture and Deaf Community, language, family, and the greater school community. Multicultural education and a cultural view of deaf children are not mutually exclusive, but rather part of the same vision of the world. Reform is always a gradual process. Schools play a vital role in creating a culturally diverse and inclusive environment that encourages every student to learn, thrive, and grow.

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World Wide Web Resources

The World Wide Web (WWW) is a rapidly expanding source of resources that are particularly valuable for educators. Website addresses frequently change and resources are constantly updated but these are good starting places.

Deaf: General and Multicultural

ASHA American Speech-Language-Hearing Association - Multicultural Issues Page:
<http://www.asha.org/multicult.htm>

Deaf World Web: <http://deafworldweb.org/>

Deaf Resources Library: <http://pantheon.yale.edu/~nakamura/deaf/>

Multicultural Deaf Web Site: <http://www.gallaudet.edu/~bgermerd/>

Multicultural Education

Andersen Schools of Many Voices Multicultural Laboratory Demonstration Site-
Other Cultural World Wide Web Sites
<http://www.mpls.k12.mn.us/MCGFDA/mcgfda.page13.html>

Eric Clearinghouse On Teaching And Teacher Education - Internet-based Diversity
Resources: <http://www.ericsp.org/intdiv.html>

History/Social Studies Web Site for K-12 Teachers -Diversity Sources:
<http://www.execpc.com/~dboals/boals.html>

How To Choose The Best Multicultural Books:<http://place.scholastic.com/instructor/hot/multicultural.htm>

Multicultural Pavilion, University of Virginia: <http://curry.edschool.Virginia.EDU:80/go/multicultural/>

The Web Of Culture: <http://www.worldculture.com/>

African American

African African/African-American Interest: <http://pages.prodigy.com/DC/ken-yaoa/AfrAmInterest.html>

Kwanzaa Information Center: <http://www.melanet.com/kwanzaa/>

Hispanic/Latino

Chicano-Latino Net: <http://latino.sscnet.ucla.edu/>

The Hispanic/Latino Telaraña : <http://www.latela.com/>

Native American

Native American Sites: <http://www.pitt.edu/~lmitten/indians.html> -

The Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center's "Sharing Ideas" series includes a variety of short papers of interest to parents and teachers of deaf children, researchers, school administrators, support service personnel, and policy makers. These widely disseminated works cover a broad range of timely topics--from the results of research to descriptions of innovative teaching strategies--with a focus on improving the quality of education for children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Readers are encouraged to copy and disseminate this paper! You may also download the entire paper from the World Wide Web. (See title page for details.)

The Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center is comprised of two federally mandated demonstration schools for students from birth through age 21 who are deaf. Located on the campus of Gallaudet University, these schools work in collaboration with a national network of exemplary programs and professionals to identify, research, develop, evaluate, and disseminate innovative curricula, materials, educational strategies, and technologies for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Clerc Center also provides training and technical assistance to families and programs throughout the United States, and serves as a model individualized educational program, working in close partnership with its students and their families.



Gallaudet University
Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center
Working for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children
Throughout the United States

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